

BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, AND ADOLESCENCE 101

are no customary playmate or joking relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, a man would rather go to his grandparents when in trouble than to his parents or uncles, because of the greater indulgence they show him.

At about the age of seven or eight the children's play-life is invaded by the serious work which they must increasingly assume. According to their sex, they are instructed by father or mother, each parent teaching the child the work he will be most occupied with as he matures. For some children, naturally, this education is deferred longer than for others, but, as a rule, boys of four or five may be seen playing about the field "helping" father by bringing him a leaf with which to light his cigarette, or "hoing" in company with him, while girls are early permitted the pleasure of accompanying their mothers to market. By observing his father at work and by helping in small tasks the boy gradually learns how to do a man's work, until at about the age of fifteen he himself can cultivate a garden. Two or three years later he is given a field of his own and seed with which to sow it. The produce from it he brings to his mother to sell for him, and she keeps what money it brings, so that he will have his savings when he wishes to marry. Little girls, for whom acquaintance with the techniques of selling in the market is desirable, are given small articles to dispose of, and the proceeds belong to them, though some mothers demand an accounting from the young tradeswomen as a further measure of training. A woman also teaches her daughter to sew, to cook, and to wash and iron, instruction which is continued until a girl, ready to be given in marriage, is able to manage all of a woman's work.

If a family can afford the expense, children begin to be prepared for their first communion at eight or ten years of age but members of poor families must wait until the money can be found — which means that some classes of candidates include grown men and women. At about the customary age for confirmation the children are informed of the family custom

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market place, quarreling is invariably heard; or if one of them sings point — derisive songs — against the other and goes so far as to name the object of derision, fighting and court action follow.

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Though many cases of *plage* are the result of affairs between young people which result in conception, it is essential in any event that the consent of the families of the man and the woman concerned be obtained to give the mating social validity. When the union is once entered upon, divorce occurs only with the abandonment or mistreatment of the woman, or her infidelity, for in these *plage* matches, the moral support of her family makes a man reluctant to send his wife away without ample justification. When a man does divorce a *plage* wife for reasons of infidelity, she may either go to another man or return to the home of her parents, where she supports herself. If after a period of years she has not established a household with another man, it often happens that her husband takes her back. Most frequently, however, where children have been born to a mating, a woman's infidelity is punished merely by beating; and proof that a wife is a wife whether or not she is legally "married" is offered by the Haitian man in this fact that a *plage* is beaten for this and less serious reasons as readily as a legal wife. Prompt action is taken against the adulterer, which, though it may on occasion be as drastic as murder, generally takes the form of recourse to magic charms. Women who carry on illicit relationships take all care, therefore, to guard unceasingly against the birth of offspring.

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Many men, at least, hold that a man is often much closer to a *plage* than to a legal wife, for his former is more attentive and less demanding than the wife with her legally assured status and permanence of tenure. Thus it comes about that

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plage spouses are frequently given generous money gifts, to be saved for the future of their children, while as a man grows older he may take up his residence with a *plage* wife, where

MATING AND MARRIAGE

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he is assured of more solicitous care from her and more deferential treatment from her children. And though when this has occurred his "legal" wife may at his death come with a justice of the peace to claim his body and his effects, this move is anticipated, so that what he has given the *placée* wife and her children is usually well out of the way. "Often they find only the four walls of the house."

A certain number of unmarried men result from this system of plural matings, some of whom remain single by preference, particularly in the cities, where the incidence of homosexuality far exceeds that found in the country. In Mirebalais itself, when the final withdrawal of the American Marines from Haiti was being celebrated, a dance called *manuba*, significantly enough the only one held indoors, was one in which male dancers danced together in couples. The sexual problem of the younger unmarried men is more often solved by means of liaisons with married women, though this has its dangers in the countryside, where the movements of every individual are known and the least tendency to unsanctioned social behavior is soon the subject for widespread gossip. Prostitutes are found everywhere, and they are by no means visited by unmarried men alone. On the whole, sex "adventures" are more indulged in by men than women, even allowing for the tendency of some women to have affairs with youths. A belief widely held, that plural wives tend so to exhaust the virility of a man that he must seek "remedies" of a magical nature from the priests of the *vodun* cult and from sorcerers, must also be mentioned. Frigidity is a principal cause for female homosexuality, and, because of a wife's reluctance to satisfy her husband, it not infrequently happens that she is sent back to her parents, where she may seek out other women. The most prevalent Haitian attitude toward homosexuality in either sex, it may be remarked, is one of derision rather than vindictiveness, as the term applied to effeminate men, *commères*, may suggest.

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428 rarest of instances, and only by fixed legal procedure, since mere verbal denial of family rights cannot deprive a person of his inheritance.

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454 Within the immediate family it is the duty of the man to procure food for his wife and children. When his fields have been harvested, the produce is taken to the house and given to the wife, who retains a portion of it for the needs of the household and sells the surplus at the market, using the money to buy clothing and other necessities for her husband, her children, and herself. A part of the sum she receives may be used to purchase animals to be used for transport, food, or breeding purposes; and whatever money is left over is saved, particularly if a desirable plot of ground is available, or a mass and ceremony for the ancestors or promised rituals for the gods are in prospect. The woman, who is held to be more thrifty than the man, is thus the banker of the family. Her opinion is prized by her husband, and though a man has the legal right to dispose of a horse or a cow or his own land as he desires, in most households nothing would be done until the wife was consulted. It is true that quarrels often arise concerning family funds held by the wife, especially when a man questions the accounting given him, or on occasion when he wants money to bet on a cock-fight or for drinking or other personal needs whose cost he does not care to have reviewed. But for many men the problem is quite well solved by the expedient of deducting a sum from his earnings without telling his wife that she has not been given the full amount.

596 (593) It is only in relatively small matters that the membership of a household acts as a self-determining unit. In affairs of greater moment the extended family must figure, for despite the informality of its organization — at least as manifested in Mirebalais — and its lack of legal sanction, its power, especially as lodged in the old folk, is none the less real. It is because of this that it is said: "The peasant consults his elders about everything he does." When a transaction of some im-

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worker receives about ten gourdes a week, in addition to his food, and the work often is of several months' duration. To do this, however, it is necessary for him to hire another to work his own garden for the period he is thus engaged. As extra money is gradually accumulated, more land is purchased, so that the returns become greater; and the process is accelerated when, upon the death of a man's father, other family land is added to what he already owns.

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Thus the drive to obtain property is an obsession with the Haitian peasant. The question of a few centimes, to say nothing of a gourde, is hotly argued; for instance, in the bidding for unclaimed lost animals held periodically at the Mairie in Mirebalais, bids are often raised by as little as five centimes, with the bidder waiting until the last possible moment, the third call of the auctioneer, before pledging the additional sum. Those who have money prefer silver to paper and usually keep it in a trunk at home, but if troublous times impend, the money is put in jars and hidden in the ground. In this way it happens that when a man dies, much of his money is lost to his heirs, for he rarely tells even his wife or children what he has done with it.

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Yet this point must be stressed — in the mind of the Haitian peasant, though wealth is desired for the prestige it gives, it is rarely prized for the display it permits. Frequently when a person of large means is pointed out in the market place, he will be simply if not poorly dressed. To make undue display of possessions would arouse envy, and envy brings upon a man's household the evil eye. Wealth is rather manifested in extensive farms, in elaborate ceremonies for the rituals held for family ancestors and for family gods, in the education of children to the end that they may eventually move to the capital and there attain social and political position of importance. Wealth brings prestige to its owner through the word-of-mouth comment of his neighbors, and with this he is content,

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Some baka are believed to be "doubles" of sorcerers who take animal form and roam at night doing evil. Pigs encountered at night are especially dreaded because of this, and those of a gray color, held to be more potent for evil than those of any other shade, are sedulously avoided. The tale is told of a man who, having encountered a gray pig at midnight which passed between his legs at great speed, was ill for months afterwards. It is also recounted how several men of uncommon bravery waited for one such pig and beat it, and how the next morning an old woman was found on whose bent back wounds inflicted by sticks could be seen. It is because of stories such as this that it is held important to worship the good loa. For if the devotee of a loa meets a baka at night, the loa comes to his head and the baka flees in terror. An autobiographical incident was related to make this point. When a lad, the man who told the tale joined his playmates in an escapade which had as its aim to frighten some young women returning home late from a vodun dance. Draped in white sheets they stationed themselves near a bridge, turning about before lighted candles in the ground. The young women were possessed by their loa the instant they caught sight of these apparitions, who promptly fled the scene to avoid capture by those who came running in reply to the songs and cries emitted by the protecting gods!

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Baka are often employed to guard buried money. "In this country, when you find money buried in jars, it is an affair of baka. There is never one jar, but always two or three, and you must call a lungan to find out which one you may take and which you must not touch. Generally the finder is allowed to take half of the treasure, for if he took all, he would be tormented by the baka who had been left as guardian." Such jars, it is said, are usually found with human bones beside them or under them, and tradition has it that the slave-owners who are believed to have been strong in magic customarily killed the most evil slave on a plantation that his spirit might keep watch over the jars. If the owner never returned, the spirit of the

MAGIC, GOOD AND BAD

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slave, as a "sold baka," remained to wreak vengeance upon anyone who dared disturb his charge.

The reality of the baka to the Haitian was made dramatically vivid by an incident involving an old blind and deaf horse. It occurred one night on the principal streets of the town of Mirbalais itself. The horse was first noticed as the sun set, groping his way along, and finally circling the turn of the road. Though people shouted at the animal, he would not give way. As darkness came and doors and windows were barred, the horse blundered into the small veranda of a house inhabited by an elderly woman, her daughter, and her grandchildren. The younger woman cried out with fright when, timidly peering about the side of the house, she saw their visitor, but the older woman, whose age made her fearless in the face of this supernatural danger, opened a window and vigorously attacked the animal with a heavy stick, while he unhurriedly tried to get clear of the blows and finally moved on to the next veranda, and so from house to house down the street. On this night the habitual tranquillity did not settle over the town, and all of the next day and many days thereafter there was quiet talk of the danger that had been abroad, and much speculation of its intended destination.

The baka are sometimes confused with the *démons*, as is seen in the fragmentary information that was obtained about the existence of secret societies, so feared by Mirbalais folk because of their reputation for working all kinds of evil that it was with difficulty that even the names of two of them could be learned — the "Blancs," whose members appear at night wearing horns and holding candles, and "Les Cochons sans Poils." The former, termed *démons*, are believed to be able to change into animals when they do their evil work, a feat which would seem to make them baka. The societies all meet in the open country at night, and each has a small drum. They are called together by the beating of one rock against another in a manner reminiscent of the Zangbero society of Porto Novo, Dahomey.

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THE HAITIAN PEOPLE

175 If contemporary testimony can be credited, the complete indiffer-
 452 ence of the Haitian elite to business was matched by their ignorance
 453 of finance when this was anything more complicated than cash pay-
 ment transactions or face-to-face exchange. They seem to have been
 wholly unfamiliar with the uses of commercial paper, the meaning
 of overdrafts, or bills of exchange. Individual credit was not under-
 stood, nor was a signature enough to start a flow of business. As one
 person from France put it in 1846, "It takes 10,000 francs of money
 to do 10,000 francs of business." "If a merchant doing a good business
 found his purse empty and needed only to borrow in order to
 purchase other goods, that circumstance offered to his mind "a
 redoubtable extremity enveloped in profound mystery; and it is a
 rule of loyalty and of honor to which Haitian commerce is never
 false, that the paper on which a man has placed his signature should
 remain, until the day the loan is paid back, impenetrably shut up in
 the portfolio of the lender."

[426] Interest, if money could be borrowed at all, was at the rate of one
 per cent a day, three per cent a month, and from sixteen per cent to
 twenty per cent a year. Thus letters of credit and promissory notes
 never moved the slightest business transaction in the country. To
 seek credit was to confess one's financial embarrassment.

175 The economic ills which harassed Haiti under Boyer were, to a
 45 greater or less degree, the same that bedeviled the country for the
 rest of the century. It seems worth while to list them, for they reveal
 the mentality of the ruling clique and caste—a mentality which
 could see no reason for altering of these basic matters, and which
 during administration after administration devoted itself to super-
 ficialities. Haiti's weaknesses were not entirely due to folly and
 clumsiness, however, but to a perfectly natural ignorance. There
 was no background for economic thinking: how should ex-slaves
 with a handful of old freedmen be familiar with credit, banking,
 overdrafts, and the like? Even education in France would not
 necessarily offer enlightenment on these matters. "Culture" meant
 literature, not economics.

These, then, have been the major economic defects of Haiti, 1806
 to 1915, due partly to ineptitude, partly to imperfect education:

1. The exclusion of all foreign or white investment, industry, and
 capital. One article in every constitution was given over to this

14. R. Lefebvre de La Riviere, *Saint-Domingue*, II, 179.

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COMMERCE

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quarantine: "Haiti for the Haitians." At first the prohibition on white ownership of land and financial investment in the country was attributable to a fear of reenslavement; then to a fear that financial commitments (which no Haitian really understood) would somehow lead to political subjection; and always the feeling of pride, combined with a desperate need of self-justification, made the Haitians want to keep their country entirely under control of their own people. It is, of course, possible that if white people had been allowed free access to the country, they might have destroyed the "Black Republic"; excluding white men altogether, however, seriously curtailed economic activity.

2. Overmilitarization. The army, numerous out of all proportion to the population, took the ablest men out of production, drained the treasury, and was a constant source of revolutionary activity.

3. Poor methods of agriculture. Critics often complained that Haiti ought to return to the system of large estates and forced labor; it apparently occurred to no one to suggest that education of the peasants might have made the land productive once more, by teaching the people new methods. Dividing up the land was an inevitable necessity unless every ruler were as willing as Christophe to be a dictator and as capable; but to keep the peasants in ignorance was not a necessity. Peasant landowners in Europe frequently tend their acres with skill, while in Haiti, with neither experience nor instruction in methods of tillage on small farms, the people developed steadily more destructive ways of farming.

4. Inefficient marketing. Assuming Haiti's dependence upon the staple crop of coffee and the handling of this crop by foreign merchants, every government seemed intent upon putting obstacles in the path of efficient marketing procedure. The white trader could deal only with Haitians (who were ignorant in matters of international trade); although the foreigner had to pay a huge license fee in order to deal at all in Haitian products, he got no security in return, for he might not own land or obtain a lien on the real property of a citizen. Banking and exchange facilities were wholly lacking.

15. In 1833 Beyer thought to "encourage" Haitians to commercial effort by gradually expelling foreign traders, refusing to grant them any new licenses to trade. His scheme failed, for the time was not imminent. Indeed, the actual effect of his plan was to disrupt the steady flow of exports and increase discontent with Beyer on the part of the elite plantation owners whose small profits were momentarily interrupted.

16. See James Franklin, *The French Rule of Haiti*, pp. 274 ff.

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THE HAITIAN PEOPLE

175 Boyer carried on Pétion's policy of no taxation. It was not until the American
 657 Occupation that Haitians could be said to be taxed. Ninety per cent of the state's
 [652] income between 1900 and 1915 regularly came from tariffs, and only ten per cent
 from internal taxes. Even the efforts of the Americans, resulting in the laws of 1904
 and 1928, were on the whole restricted to a few excise taxes. A land tax was hope-
 less, due to the utter confusion of titles and the stubborn intransigence of peasant
 squatters.³

2. Monetary Policy of Pétion and Boyer

175 The monetary situation in Haiti was chaotic in its early days. The gold money
 652 of France, Spain, England, and the United States circulated, as did small French
 coins, and the coins and paper money created by the Haitian rulers, who had com-
 plete control over money. For example, Pétion decreed⁴ an increase in the value of
 the *gourde d'Espagne* from 8 livres 5 sols, to 9 livres; of the French *écu* of 6 francs
 from 9 livres to 9 livres 15 sols; and the 3 franc *écu* from 7 livres 10 sols to 8 livres
 5 sols; this almost doubled the value of money in circulation. He also struck small
 coins to replace the pieces of 30, 24, 15, 12, and 6 sols of France. His small coins were
 merely token money.⁵ The paper currency created by Pétion and so easily counter-
 feited has been mentioned.

[433] Boyer was consciously in financial perplexities. Production was declining while
 expenditures had to be radically increased on account of the settlement with
 France in 1843. Boyer's budget was not a large one judged by modern standards,
 the average expenditure each year being about \$5,000,000. To meet this, customs
 duties on imports and exports brought in about \$2,000,000 annually; territorial
 duties on produce, houses, patents or licenses, market fees, and the like, a similar
 sum; but some half-million dollars had to be borrowed each year. The government
 hoped to get something from developing mines in the Spanish part of the island,
 but this hope failed. It was thought also that the sale of government lands might
 bring in some revenue, but few people wanted to invest money, when they had it,
 in land, with agricultural affairs developing as they were and no way of making
 people work: investment in trade was more promising. The national treasury was
 so empty that both the civil and military officials were poorly paid. It was fre-
 quently said that almost all administrators and persons in authority were open to
 bribery. Moreover the number of civil servants was increasing: there was a swarm
 of hangers-on and subalterns in every commune, like a host of vampires. By their
 lack of honesty, conscientiousness, and efficiency, immense sums were lost an-
 nually to the treasury.

3. See the Report of the American High Commissioner (1904), p. 19.

4. May 4, 1808.

5. Pétion voulait s'échapper de ses États les gourdes qu'il émettait au débilité avec Chris-
 tophe, et pour les rendre l'engagement idéal d'y produire une monnaie. Ce moyen était trop
 efficace pour ne pas réussir, et il était trop simple pour que l'emploi d'un tel moyen ne soit
 pas un déshonneur. Ainsi, lorsqu'il en vint à battre monnaie, le chef de l'État de Saint-
 Dominique le tira de sa gourde à peu près au titre de la gourde espagnole faite par son compa-
 gnon. Il lui donna 428 millions de francs. L'opinion de Saint-Denis, Saint-Domingue,
 &c. 1794.